



# ASIA MAIOR

Vol. XXXIII / 2022

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## **Asia in 2022: The impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on local crises**

**Edited by**  
**Michelguglielmo Torri**  
**Filippo Boni**  
**Diego Maiorano**

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**viella**

A large, intricate mandala graphic is positioned on the right side of the cover. It features complex, concentric patterns with scalloped and pointed edges, rendered in a light orange color against the darker orange background.

CENTRO STUDI PER I POPOLI EXTRA-EUROPEI “CESARE BONACOSSA” - UNIVERSITÀ DI PAVIA

# ASIA MAIOR

The Journal of the Italian think tank on Asia founded by Giorgio Borsa in 1989

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Asia Maior. The Journal of the Italian Think Tank on Asia founded by Giorgio Borsa in 1989.

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ISBN 979-12-5496-365-0 (Paper) ISBN 979-12-5496-366-7 (Online)

ISSN 2385-2526 (Paper) ISSN 2612-6680 (Online)

Annual journal - Vol. XXXIII, 2022

This journal is published jointly by the think tank Asia Maior (Associazione Asia Maior) & the CSPE - Centro Studi per i Popoli Extra-europei «Cesare Bonacossa», University of Pavia

*Asia Maior: The Journal of the Italian Think Tank on Asia founded by Giorgio Borsa in 1989* is an open-access journal, whose issues and single articles can be freely downloaded from the think tank webpage: [www.asiamaior.org](http://www.asiamaior.org).

The reference year is the one on which the analyses of the volume are focused. Each *Asia Maior* volume is always published in the year following the one indicated on the cover.

Paper version	Italy	€ 50.00	Abroad	€ 65.00
Subscription	<a href="mailto:abbonamenti@viella.it">abbonamenti@viella.it</a>		<a href="http://www.viella.it">www.viella.it</a>	

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*libreria editrice*

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JAPAN 2022: PUTIN AND ABE SHOCKS THWART KISHIDA'S ENJOYMENT  
OF THREE GOLDEN YEARS DESPITE MAJOR DEFENCE OVERHAUL

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*Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the assassination of record-setting former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō impacted heavily on Japan's domestic politics and international relations. Diplomatically, Tokyo forcefully aligned with its Western partners against Russia's aggression while making progress in enhancing awareness that the European and Indo-Pacific strategic theatres are politically intertwined. In addition to doubling down on its alignment with the more combative approach to China of the United States, Japan continued to diversify its bilateral and mini-lateral strategic partnerships as Tokyo's Indo-Pacific framing of regional geopolitical dynamics gained even greater global salience. In the future, Japan's strategic outreach should be backed by a more potent Japanese defence force as Prime Minister Kishida Fumio adopted plans to substantially enhance Japan's warfighting capabilities in late-2022 after a year-long review of defence settings. Such plans could also put Tokyo on the path to wield the Self-Defense Forces with greater autonomy in the 2030s and, if required, impose substantial military costs on its adversaries. Domestically, Japanese politics was tragically overshadowed by the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō. The political fallout had unanticipated negative consequences for Prime Minister Kishida as issues surrounding Mr. Abe's state funeral and ruling party connections to the Unification Church destroyed his administration's popularity in the second half of 2022. By the end of 2022, there was no sign of Kishida's «three golden years» of domestic political peace as scandals involving cabinet ministers and controversy over tax rises to fund Japan's defence build-up confounded Mr. Kishida's ability to exert control over his own party.*

KEYWORDS – Japan-Ukraine relations; minilateralism; 2022 upper house elections; Abe Shinzō's assassination; Japan's security policy.

### 1. Introduction

Japan's international and domestic political trajectories were dramatically altered in 2022 by two major shocks. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine had multifaceted impacts. First, it gave Prime Minister Kishida Fumio the opportunity to ditch Tokyo's balancing act vis-à-vis Moscow as the Japanese government joined its G7 partners in imposing tough sanctions

on Russia. Strengthening Japan's alignment with American global strategy, Tokyo also bridged the gap between «like-minded» players across the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theatres with its enhanced strategic outreach to Europe. Russia's actions further compounded ongoing Sino-US hegemonic rivalry while preventing any improvement in Sino-Japanese relations. Second, Kishida took advantage of Moscow-induced inflation, specifically energy shortages and import price rises, to reverse Tokyo's post-3/11 «nuclear zero» policy of gradually phasing out Japan's nuclear reactors. Nuclear energy is now back as a legitimate part of Japan's overall energy mix and decarbonization agenda. Finally, Moscow's aggression of Ukraine hastened the most significant overhaul of Japan's defence policy in almost four decades. Backed by the rapidly accelerated procurement of stand-off capabilities [Pugliese and Maslow 2020; Wallace and Pugliese 2021], Tokyo's plans – if implemented – point to enhanced Japanese power projection capabilities as well as a future Self-Defense Force (SDF) capable of both generating and sustaining force during high-end combat. Such plans could put Tokyo on the path to wield the SDF with greater autonomy in the 2030s to thwart the regional military activities of Japan's adversaries and impose substantial military costs. In a similar vein, the government also enhanced its attempts to sharpen its economic security tools throughout 2022, building on changes stretching back to the Abe administration [*Japan News* 2020, 4 January].

Domestically, Japanese politics was tragically overshadowed by another shock – the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō during the 2022 House of Councillors electoral campaign. Mr. Abe's record-setting tenure as prime minister and his reputation as a globe-trotting statesman meant world leaders also reacted with shock to Mr. Abe's murder. The political fallout had unanticipated negative consequences for Prime Minister Kishida as issues surrounding Mr. Abe's state funeral and ruling party connections to the Unification Church destroyed his administration's popularity in the second half of 2022. With Mr. Abe expected to be a major operator behind the scenes for years – if not decades – internal Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) machinations to fill the political vacuum were also on display. Scandals involving cabinet ministers, and Mr. Kishida's missteps on the issue of raising taxes to fund Japan's defence build-up, resulted in support for the Kishida administration continuing to languish. Entering 2023, Mr. Kishida had only tenuous control over his own party.

## *2. Japan responds to Russia's war: Strong solidarity with Ukraine with an eye on China*

Japan's complex international situation only became more complicated during 2022. Russian president Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine on 24 February elicited fear and all-round condemnation in Tokyo as they did



in many other global capitals. Mr. Kishida himself was unequivocally critical as local media outlets and eminent personalities unified across the Japanese political spectrum to call out Russia's naked aggression [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2022a]. Faced with Russia's blatant violation of international law and the increasing prominence of raw power politics in international relations, Japan forcefully aligned itself with its G7 counterparts.

Tokyo therefore ditched its balancing act vis-à-vis Moscow prominent during the Abe administration. On 1 March, Japan's House of Representatives overwhelmingly condemned Russia's action as «unacceptable» and a «serious violation of international law» that «could shake the very foundations of the international order, including that of Asia» [*Asahi Shinbun* 2022a, 2 March]. Putin's geopolitical adventurism compounded already negative perceptions of Russia in Japan stemming from unresolved territorial disputes and historical grievances dating back to World War II [Muminov 2022]. In one poll, 61% of respondents were in favour of strict sanctions on Russia in lockstep with Japan's Western partners.

This is a much higher level of support compared to the 2014 Ukraine crisis and the Russian occupation of Crimea when Tokyo adopted tepid sanctions [*Nikkei Asia* 2022, 28 February]. Since Abe Shinzō's return to power in late 2012, Tokyo's efforts to find a solution over the disputed Southern Kurils/Northern Territories accelerated, albeit to no avail. While based on a heavy dose of wishful thinking [Brown 2017; Richardson 2018], the Abe administration believed that a deal on the territorial dispute would have also allowed Tokyo to reorient its military forces towards its south-western maritime domain to counter China. Such rapprochement between Moscow and Tokyo would have also enabled greater Japanese investment in Siberia to reduce Russian dependence on Chinese capital along the Sino-Russian border.

During the 2014 Ukrainian crisis and the annexation of Crimea, Japan sided with American sanctions policy, but only with limited enthusiasm. The door was left open for talks with Russia and Abe personally engaged Vladimir Putin on the basis of cool-headed calculations premised on the assumption of Moscow's shrinking strategic horizons [Brown 2018; Brown 2019; Dian & Kireeva 2021]. According to a former high-ranking government official, administration officials anticipated that the Russian government would eventually respond positively to Japan's overtures to avoid over-reliance on China [Interview 2019a]. Russia's strengthening of its already rather solid hold over the Southern Kurils—notably through new clauses in Russia's revised constitution in 2020 that banned territorial concessions—should have dashed the hopes of most Japanese policymakers.

Yet, the Kishida government initially remained open to dialogue with Moscow in light of geo-strategic, economic, and energy considerations and out of consideration for Mr. Abe, who was instrumental in bringing Kishida to power. With Putin's actions Tokyo committed to tougher global sanctions

in 2022. It froze all yen-denominated assets held by Russia's Central Bank, banned swapping Russian sovereign debt, and targeted Russian financial institutions and leaders, including President Putin, with restrictions on their activity. Tokyo also joined Western efforts to block certain Russian banks from accessing the SWIFT international payment system and announced a series of strict export controls on semiconductors amongst other technology goods. Finally, Tokyo also drew up a list of Russian military and security entities banned from accessing any Japanese exports [Brown & Sposato 2022, 2 March; Johnson 2022, 1 March; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2022b].

Tokyo – and Japan as a whole – were also eager to assist Ukraine. Japanese defence officials surprised European counterparts when they immediately agreed to sending non-lethal military aid to Ukraine. This included helmets, bullet-proof jackets, and controversially (for Japan), civilian drones [*The Asahi Shimbun* 2022, 7 May; Johnson 2022]. By the end of 2022, Tokyo had sent Ukraine and neighbouring countries roughly US\$700 million in humanitarian assistance and US\$600 million in financial assistance [Prime Minister's Office of Japan 2022]. Direct testimonies from Japan's counterparts in Europe suggest it was a welcome change from past practice where Japan was often a diplomatic laggard [Interview 2022a]. This was helped by well-established consultations among G7 member states, and in 2022 the growing political interlinkage between the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific strategic theatres continued to grow. This is in no small part an outgrowth of Tokyo's diplomatic efforts (see below), not unlike the governments of Japan, Australia and the United States' geographic re-packaging of the Asia-Pacific region into the new geopolitics of the «Indo-Pacific» (Pelaggi & Termine 2023).

Russian aggression also impacted Japanese civil society. Donations supporting Ukraine surged and volunteers (mostly former SDF officers) enlisted in the «international brigade» set up by Kiev to help fight against the Russian invaders [*The Asahi Shimbun* 2022a, 1 March; *Mainichi Shinbun* 2022, 1 March; *Nippon.com* 2022, 2 March]. The LDP's Director of the National Defense Division of the Policy Research Council voiced support for these volunteers [*Asahi Shinbun* 2022a, 3 March]. The Japanese government also found uncharacteristically strong public support for the acceptance of Ukrainian refugees [*Mainichi Shinbun* 2022, 26 April]. At first, Tokyo allowed roughly 120 Japan-based Ukrainian citizens with temporary visas to extend their stay in Japan and then moved to allow Ukrainian refugees, starting with spouses and relatives of Japanese expatriates as well as «friends and relatives of people living in Japan» [*The Asahi Shimbun* 2022b, 1 March; *Nippon.com (Jiji Press)* 2022, 2 March]. As of writing, Tokyo had accepted and supported about 2230 refugees, despite Japan usually taking fewer than 100 in any given year [Immigration Services Agency 2023; *Kyodo News* 2022, 13

May; *Nippon.com* 2022, 27 December; *NPR* 2022, 29 October].<sup>1</sup> These have gone hand-in-hand with efforts from non-governmental organizations, such as universities, which have opened their doors to Ukrainian students and scholars [Support Measures for Ukrainian Students by Japanese Universities and Japanese Language Institutes 2022].

Japan's alignment with the West in condemning and sanctioning Russia's unprovoked act of aggression has likely put an end to Tokyo's balancing act towards Moscow. For the sake of preserving «the international rules-based order», the Kishida administration also worked hard on the diplomatic front (or, at the very least, proactively communicated its efforts) to convince as many Southeast Asian states and, without success, India to condemn Russia's war of aggression [Itō 2022]. Japanese policymakers likely reasoned that Russia's aggression required a strong economic and normative reaction. An aging and shrinking Japan would be particularly troubled by the emergence of an international order increasingly defined by the logic of «might equals right».

### 3. *Putin facilitates a Japanese energy reversal*

Putin's actions also put on hold Japanese public and private sector ambitions to diversify energy sources from the Middle East through the purchase of Russian hydrocarbons. Since the mid-2000s, Japanese businesses have injected capital and technology into joint ventures with Russian companies. Thus, Western sanctions, such as Shell's decision to divest from the Sakhalin-II LNG pipeline project connecting Russia with Japan, were a hard act to follow for Japanese businesses. In fact, most of the Sakhalin project's gas was exported to energy-poor Japan and it was concurrently the fastest way to get hydrocarbon resources into the country; moreover, Mitsui and Mitsubishi retained a 22.5% stake of the project. Walking out was going to result in major sunk costs while allowing China to reap the benefits of cheap Russian gas and Chinese firms were in talks with Russian counterparts to buy up Shell's stakes [Brown and Sposato 2022; *Nikkei Asia* 2022, 23 April]. Following its invasion, Russia retaliated by seizing control of the project, ensuring that international energy companies could not extract financial compensation following their exit; similar dynamics and considerations were at play with the Sakhalin I Oil and Gas Development, where Japanese energy companies kept their stakes in Russian hydrocarbon projects anticipating future post-Putin changes in Russia's attitudes to

1. The overwhelming majority of these refugees were provided with «designated activities» visas. Japan's Ministry of Justice officially labelled them as «evacuees» (避難民) rather than «refugees» (難民), however, implying an expectation that these people will return to their home country if hostilities abate – notwithstanding the desire of one in four refugees to stay.

cooperation [*Asahi Shinbun* 2022b, 2 March; *Bloomberg* 2022, 1 September; Rao 2023, 13 January].

Despite this nascent energy cooperation, Japan's overall bilateral energy dependency on Russia is not as deep as Europe's – energy imports from Russia came to just 6.5% of total imports in 2022 [Kumagai and Gordon 2021, 24 February]. Nevertheless, Japan's increased reliance on fossil fuels (close to 90%) following the triple disaster in Tōhoku in 2011, and the food and energy shortages and price rises precipitated by Russia's actions, resulted in a major turnaround in Japan's energy policy unthinkable even five years ago. Only seven nuclear reactors were in operation in Japan in early 2022 [*Reuters* 2022, 24 February]. By the end of 2022, ten reactors were operating with another seven having passed safety checks. Demonstrating that necessity has been the mother of invention, in the final weeks of 2022 Tokyo committed to a new plan to restart and/or extend the lifespan of as many of its 33 existing operable nuclear reactors as possible. To meet its goal of 22% nuclear generation by 2030 and further its decarbonization goals, the government went as far as publicly announcing the construction of new next generation reactors – all with grudging public acceptance [Arai 2022, 23 December; Kawasaki & Take 2022, 29 November; Reynolds & Umekawa 2022, 22 December; Yamaguchi 2022, 22 December].

The fears elicited in Japan by Russian aggression were, however, not just about Russia throwing around its geopolitical weight. One February survey found 77% of Japanese respondents were concerned about the Ukraine conflict spilling over to Asia and impacting the volatile Taiwan situation. China remains, after all, Japan's most pressing security challenge [Nemoto 2022, 28 February]. As speculation over the relative decline of the United States precipitates questions about its security guarantees, Tokyo was clearly viewing the tragic events in Ukraine with an eye on its military and economic balancing act *vis-à-vis* China. The concern was that a tepid global response would embolden its influential Asian neighbour to assert itself in the region to an even greater extent. While North Korea launched a record number of ballistic missiles in 2022, China's regional assertiveness and Cross-Strait tensions worried Japanese officials and public opinion the most.

#### 4. *Japan-PRC relations at fifty: No time for celebrations*

The year under review marked fifty years since President Richard Nixon's historic visit to China and the landmark Shanghai Communiqué negotiated with Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong. It also marked fifty years since the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations and Tokyo's concomitant severance of diplomatic ties with the Republic of China (Taiwan). Politicians and bureaucrats in Japan were caught by surprise by the announcement of Nixon's July 1971 trip to Beijing. However, it was Tokyo that more proactively

engaged Beijing up until the mid-1990s. Fifty years since the momentous events of 1972, the Japanese government was now working more closely with the United States government on China policy – to confront, deter, and in some cases, contain a China led by its strongest political leader since Mao. Tokyo also worked with the United States to further open up diplomatic space for engagement with democratic Taiwan. Russia’s war in Ukraine and potential parallels drawn between Ukraine and Taiwan in Japan and the United States, meant that 2022 was no time for celebrations in Japan-China relations.

Even before Russia’s initiation of war with Ukraine, foreign minister Hayashi Yoshimasa highlighted in an interview that «the pace of change of the international situation is incredibly rapid. In short, I strongly feel that we are living in epoch-making times» [Yoshimasa & Tanaka 2022]. He further touched upon how Tokyo needed to be frank with Beijing and uphold a resolute stance with China in line with Prime Minister Kishida’s «Three Resolutions» policy: the resolution to uphold universal values; to defend Japan’s peace and stability; and to contribute to mankind through a multilateral approach that takes into account international society. The foreign minister recognized deep economic links between China and Japan in both the trade and investment and that some tensions were a given; he also stated clearly that there are issues on which Japan cannot make concessions—notably China’s murky military build-up and Beijing’s willingness to change the status quo through coercion in the East and South China Seas. Asked about China’s White Paper on democratic values, he stated that what needs to be said will be said on Hong Kong, Tibet, Xinjiang but also that Japan would cooperate with China whenever possible [Yoshimasa & Tanaka 2022].<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, following Russia’s invasion Japanese policymakers wasted little time explicitly linking Russia’s aggression against Ukraine with China’s more assertive foreign and security policy. Narratives that linked Xi Jinping’s one-man rule with Vladimir Putin’s were also fruitful and heightened public attention to the dangers of military contingencies across the Taiwan Strait and military security in general [Nihon Keizai Shinbun 2022, 9 September; Kiyofumi and Sadamasa 2022; Sadamasa 2022, 5 August]. Authoritative China and Taiwan Studies specialists lamented the excessive attention to that comparison by underlining that China’s policy had *not* changed and was still focused on so-called «peaceful unification» without ruling out force to prevent independence [Matsuda 2022: 1]. At the same time, Chinese decision-makers projected strength and engaged in assertive, if not aggressive, behaviour, with the goal of deterring moves towards *de*

2. There was scant proof throughout 2022 that human rights considerations drove the management of bilateral relations, so much so that the Prime Minister’s special advisor on international human rights, Nakatani Gen, hardly made the news. This is despite the dynamics identified in our 2021 *Asia Maior* contribution.

*jure* and/or *de facto* independence [Insisa 2021b]. Thus, Cross-Strait relations continued to showcase action-reaction dynamics typical of a security dilemma in 2022 [Insisa 2021a].

Taiwan is also a key area of growing alignment between the United States and Japanese governments. Both nations have increasingly supported efforts to increase Taiwan's international space and to deter Chinese aggression. Tokyo stressed in the 2022 Defense White Paper that: «The stability of the situation surrounding Taiwan is also critical for Japan's security and must be closely monitored with a sense of urgency while cooperating with the international community, based on the recognition that changes to the status quo by coercion are globally shared challenges» [Ministry of Defense of Japan 2023a]. Along with European, American and Canadian parliamentary visits to the island, Japanese lawmakers stepped up their own engagement with Taiwan throughout 2022 [*Bloomberg* 2022, 22 August; Executive Yuan 2022; *Taiwan Today* 2022, 28 July; *Taiwan Today* 2022, 11 October], showcasing support for a democratic Taiwanese state under constant military, diplomatic and hybrid pressure [Congiu and Onnis 2022; Insisa 2022; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 2022; West & Insisa forthcoming].

At the same time, the visit by the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, compounded the aforementioned action-reaction dynamics. Shortly ahead of Pelosi's visit, Taiwan's «China Times» unionist newspaper published a background story based on testimonies and leaked Taiwanese diplomatic cables on quiet moral suasion efforts back in Washington DC designed to prevent the Speaker's visit. According to the article, the White House and the Pentagon tried to dissuade Pelosi from visiting Taiwan and Taipei even quietly withdrew Pelosi's invitation. The cables were probably leaked by the Taiwanese government to showcase the administration's restraint to local public opinion, and possibly also as a gesture of goodwill to Beijing, which aggressively lobbied and sent veiled threats to policymakers in Washington to deter the visit – to no avail [*China Times* 2022, 2 August].

All sides ultimately had little choice but to react strongly to Pelosi's decision to visit Taiwan, constituting an apt window to worrisome regional dynamics.<sup>3</sup> As Biden and Xi respectively faced the American mid-term elections and the Chinese Communist Party National Congress, neither government could be seen to back down. This was especially true for China, where Taiwan was a non-negotiable issue for local nationalism, a growingly commodified phenomenon that was not necessarily under party-state control [Gries and Wang 2021; Wang and Chew 2021]. Therefore, on August 2, China announced a set of military exercises across the Strait. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) coordinated a massive show of force that mimicked

3. The visit was not comparable to the earlier one by then Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich in 1997, not least because he had visited China beforehand and spent less than three hours in Taiwan.

a blockade while demonstrating coordination among different branches of the military. Live ammunition drills accompanied high-precision ballistic missiles launches within designated splash areas around Taiwan. PRC aircraft also trespassed the median line. In addition, China engaged in grey zone coercion that resembled Beijing's reaction to the 2010 and 2012 crises around the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Informal sanctions, such as embargoes of Taiwanese exports to the mainland, went along cyber operations aimed at public infrastructure and even convenience stores.

Thus, the visit by the US government's third highest-ranking political representative shook the fragile cross-Strait status quo and risked opening a major international crisis – despite the ongoing war ravaging Ukraine, a global energy and food crisis, and the spectre of European stagflation. The drills also had cognitive warfare goals since the splash areas encircled Taiwan and suggested that China was willing and able to cut Japan's air and sea supply lines, especially from US and Japanese military bases in Okinawa Prefecture. They were also aimed at impressing on Chinese and international audiences that the Chinese military forces had come a long way since the 1995-1996 missile crises across the Taiwan Strait [Hass 2022, 16 August].

Beijing's heavy-handed response saved face for Xi and may well have established a new normal across the Taiwan Strait. For instance, in August 2022, PLA aircraft trespassed the median line every single day. This is a worrying development because the median line was implicitly acknowledged by both sides until recently as a buffer zone [Insisa 2019].<sup>4</sup> Pelosi's visit ignited China's «reactive aggressiveness», which may have also been calculated, and most regional players' immediate official statements acknowledged the need for restraint, de-escalation and dialogue on all sides; by one count, most regional actors opted for a neutral position [Tiezzi 2022, 13 August].

Yet, the G7 foreign ministers' joint statement on 3 August tilted towards a more combative stance [Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy 2022]. The language criticized China's coercive measures against the island while downplaying the destabilizing impact of Nancy Pelosi's visit. The statement was particularly significant in demonstrating that Europe and the European Union as a whole became more adversarial towards Beijing in 2022. The main reasons have much to do with the crescendo of China crises that garnered attention in Europe: the COVID-19 pandemic, the suppression of human rights in Xinjiang, and the national security law's death-knell for Hong Kong's autonomy. These events raised serious concerns surrounding China's future behaviour, since the Hong Kong case demonstrated Beijing's willingness to renege on pledges made in an international treaty (the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration). Those actions, along with the Chinese government's coercive overreach against

4. In 2019, China started performing incursions, but only in the low single digits.

European sanctions on human rights abuses in Xinjiang, its economic bullying of Lithuania and, in Spring 2022, China's ambiguous positioning on the Ukraine War, directly affected European interests and crystallized Europe's adversarial posture vis-à-vis Beijing – including in Mario Draghi's Italy [Andornino 2023; *Financial Times* 2022, 17 October].

The Japanese government's position on China remained strongly aligned with Washington's throughout 2022. A joint communique with Australia and the United States on 5 August emphasized «concern about [China's] recent actions that gravely affect international peace and stability» [U.S. Department of State 2022a]. Significantly, within the G7 Japan's position was the toughest in openly questioning the applicability (or not!) of the members' «respective One-China policy» [Interview, 2022b; Liff 2022].<sup>5</sup> In connection with this, China's Minister of Foreign Affairs staged a walk-out during Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi's speech at the ASEAN Regional Forum on 5 August. Wang Yi fumed that: «I am afraid the Japanese side should think about whether they have done something very wrong to China» [*The Asahi Shimbun* 2022, 6 August]. The Japanese government also lamented China's launch of ballistic missiles; five out of nine missiles fell into Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), northeast of Taiwan (although it should be noted that the EEZ is disputed with the Republic of China, Taiwan). Analysis and first-hand reporting suggested that the PLA had prepared less provocative options for Xi as the leader of China's Central Military Commission, but China's core leader decided otherwise [Nakazawa 2022, 25 August]. China's show of force was clearly aimed at showcasing its ability to target precision ballistic missiles towards key strategic areas through which American and Japanese frontline forces and logistical support would transit in a hypothetical Taiwan contingency scenario.

Kishida's willingness to meet and greet the US Speaker of the House in Japan following her visit to Taiwan was also significant together with the warm words exchanged that emphasized the need for the United States and Japan to «work closely together to maintain peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait». Tokyo's condemnation of Chinese sabre-rattling testified to the substantial strength in Japan-Taiwan relations and, conversely, to the wobbling state of Sino-Japanese relations [Pugliese and Wallace 2022; Zakowski 2023]. In the authors' view, the government of Japan and senior military figures from its military establishment actively capitalized on Rus-

5. See the aforementioned G7 Foreign Ministers' Statement. On Japan's One-China policy, refer to Liff (2022), with the caveat that the otherwise robust analysis mythologizes the Japanese government's stance as uniquely nuanced. In fact, Tokyo took wording contained in the normalization of diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and France, and also Canada and Italy. As our analyses throughout the years have demonstrated, the Japanese government's position on Taiwan has quietly shifted, especially since the mid-2000s.



sia's war in Ukraine and Chinese shadow boxing across the Strait to legitimize a defence overhaul that was a long time in the making, and to raise the security awareness of Japanese public opinion. A high-ranking Taiwanese government officer testified to this logic: «Taiwan is on the same page with Japan concerning its 'propaganda', because both need something to rouse the population from their security slumber»; and specific to the security overhauls of both Taiwan and Japan, «how we invest today, is what we garner tomorrow» (sic) [Interview 2023]. In fact, Japan was quietly investing in its defense links with Taiwan as demonstrated by the decision to post an active duty high-ranking Ministry of Defense official, rather than a retired uniformed officer and actually in addition to it, to Japan's *de facto* embassy in Taipei [Taipei Times, 2022, 5 June; Kotani 2022].

At the end of 2022 when Japan published the new National Security Strategy, it described «China's current external stance, military activities and other activities [as] a matter of serious concern for Japan and the international community» that were «unprecedented» in posing the «greatest strategic challenge in ensuring the peace and security of Japan and the peace and stability of the international community» [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2022c]. Notwithstanding the Komeito's last-minute intervention to soften the rhetoric [Nikkei Asia 2022, 15 December], Tokyo effectively picked up Washington's language register when recrafting its National Security Strategy. While the National Security Strategy highlighted the North Korean threat and Russia's external and military activities, balancing China across the military, diplomatic, and techno-economic chessboards remained central to Japanese (and American) foreign policy. Tokyo remained committed to tackling China's «incremental revisionism» in the region and beyond [Natalizia & Termine 2021].

##### 5. *Japan's mini-lateral diplomacy: Convergence with «Like-Minded» countries on techno-economic competition with China*

The year under review testified to convergence between Europe and Japan. The war in Ukraine led to comparisons between neo-authoritarian Russia's imperialist appetite in Ukraine with China's coercion of democratic Taiwan, if not hasty conclusions concerning an indissoluble Moscow-Beijing axis also in Europe. Indicative of growing polarization surrounding China, the joint statement of the EU-Japan bilateral in May 2022 emphasised «cooperation for a free and open Indo-Pacific» (in line with Japan's preferred language) and lauded Tokyo's support of Ukraine – it also echoed Tokyo's language in condemning unilateral attempts at changing the status quo around the «Senkaku islands» – *not* the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands [European Council 2022]. Similarly, a convergence of interests across the Atlantic and Pacific quadrant was evident in the new NATO Strategic Concept and the

Madrid summit with the participation of Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea as Indo-Pacific partners. The time was ripe for EU-Japan and NATO-Japan cooperation in domains as diverse as maritime security, cyber security, and maritime domain awareness and the exchange of best practices [Ozawa 2022; Shelter-Jones 2022; Zappa 2022]. This embrace was a long time in the making and promised new important developments in the years to come [Glosserman 2022].

Moreover, in 2022 Japan acted in coordination with other regional players – notably Australia, the United States, and France – to promote greater military presence of European actors to buttress the so-called «rules-based international order» and to foster joint military technological innovation, such as the Japan-UK-Italy Global Combat Air Program to develop a sixth-generation fighter.

Under President Yoon Suk-yeol, who began his presidential term in May 2022, Japan and South Korea also significantly improved relations. The timid reset was helped by North Korea's missile breakout, more intense threat perception vis-à-vis China, and domestic political change in both Japan and South Korea – the latter aspect often strongly associated with foreign policy reformulation in both countries [Milani et alia 2019]. Said détente included the resumption of trilateral military exercises with the United States after a five-year hiatus [*Kyodo News* 2022, 26 October]. The two governments also discussed directly connecting their radar infrastructure, something which the United States currently facilitates as an intermediary. Faced with the DPRK's highest ever number of ballistic missile launches, the two countries vowed by year end to share military intelligence in real time [*Yonhap News* 2023, January 1]. The new heads of government in Seoul and Tokyo met with American counterparts on the fringes of the Madrid NATO summit to reprise dialogue at the summit level [Lim 2023, 6 January].

2022 also saw increased space being given to Japan's economic security agenda in its diplomacy as its own domestic economic security legislation came into effect [*Nippon.com* 2022, 1 August]. Based on this agenda, the Japanese government wanted to position itself as a rule-maker with «like-minded partners» on new technology standards, while pushing for «strategic indispensability» in global technology chains and securing itself «strategic autonomy» through access to key technologies and materials. Said strategic autonomy would be achieved through so-called «friend-shoring».

Japan's diplomatic touchstone for overseas cooperation on economic security is of course the United States. Under President Biden, the American government assessment on China has proceeded in line with the Trump administration's rhetoric: «The PRC is the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it. Beijing has ambitions to create an enhanced sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific and to become

the world's leading power» [The White House 2022c].<sup>6</sup> Washington made increasing use of the U.S. Department of Commerce's Entity List during the Trump administration to restrict trade with certain persons, corporations, or governments. The number of Chinese individuals and legal entities blacklisted grew from 11 in 2018, to 42 in 2019, and to 108 in 2020 [Department of Commerce]. The Biden administration ripened those fruits and in October 2022 the Department of Commerce embargoed exports of advanced semiconductors, including relevant machinery, know-how and human capital to the whole of China. This was a watershed moment exemplifying the United States' willingness to take advantage of its pervasive centrality in global technological nodes to wield it as a weapon for both security and protectionist goals [Bureau of Industry and Security 2022; Farrell and Newman 2019].

Tokyo and Washington sought to take advantage of mini-lateral cooperation to blunt China's attempt to create «an enhanced sphere of influence». Proactive Japanese diplomacy at the «mini-lateral» level on functional security and economic issues therefore stood out in 2022. In particular, Tokyo bridged the gap between so-called «like-minded» players across the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theatres. These initiatives fell squarely in line with Washington's pronounced tendency to bypass the dysfunctionality of the multilateral system and cement *ad hoc* coalitions among democratic allies, as exemplified by AUKUS, the Quad, the Partnership for the Blue Pacific, and cooperation among G-7 partners – with the occasional addition of India, Australia and South Korea (also known as Democratic10, D-10). Effective multilateralism had already suffered because of great power competition and the pluralization of global governance of the 2010s, thus mini-lateral cooperation became more widespread in the 2020s [Caffarena and Gabusi 2021; Dian and Menegazzi 2018]. Aside from hastening the balkanization of global governance, long-standing regional multilateral fora such as the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Pacific Islands' Pacific Islands Forum have felt the heat from these competing mini-laterals, if not from China itself. In fact, and notwithstanding rhetorical pledges to ASEAN centrality, traditional functionalist organizations such as ASEAN may be side-lined and lose relevance due to the mushrooming of competing mini-laterals.

The China-Japan-South Korea mini-lateral, however, was in far worse shape. According to a high-ranking Korean diplomat who knows its inner workings well, there was scarce political will and small bureaucratic capacity to allow it to work, notwithstanding its scope was already limited to «small issues that interested all parties» [Interview 2022c]. The last trilateral summit was in December 2019 and even then, frictions emerged within the

6. See, for comparisons, the assessment in the Indo-Pacific Strategic Framework from the Trump administration [US National Security Council 2018], a declassified document that prioritizes the denial of a Chinese sphere of influence.

limited functionalist scope set by the three governments. The Trilateral's technical dialogues on nuclear safety, for instance, reached an impasse as Japan's neighbours reacted angrily against Tokyo's decision to dispose filtered nuclear water into the Pacific. Still, Japan and South Korean officials in 2022 at the bilateral level attempted to mend ties on tricky issues such as the issue of nuclear wastewater [*Xinhua News* 2022, 2 June]. South Korea's response to Japan's security overhaul was also relatively positive (see below).

Further reflective of techno-economic competition was the May 2022 Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) summit held in Tokyo testified to the expanding remit of what was originally a maritime security dialogue. It now includes the provision of international public goods, such as vaccines, quality infrastructure, and maritime domain awareness (see below). It also focused on concerns over illegal fishing, cybersecurity, and critical supply chains. Similarly, on the technological and economic front, the United States continued to constrain China's technological catch-up and prevent it from setting global standards through its industrial champions. At the same time, however, these goals were parallel to, and often ran into tension with, Washington's (especially National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan's) stated «foreign policy for the middle class», effectively a paradigmatic shift in economic philosophy to favour economic redistribution, industrial policy and industrial reshoring. It could also be viewed as a means to soothe the brewing tensions between labour and (global) capital, not just to address «predatory» exploitation by China [Small 2022: 191-4]. This paradigmatic shift was already evident under Trump, and the Biden administration did not repeal most of the previous government's tariffs on Chinese goods and services.

Biden's Secretary of Commerce openly stated that the US needed to «slow down China's rate of innovation» in coordination with US allies [*CNBC* 2021, 28 September]. For that very purpose, the US government set up a Trade and Technology Council (TTC) with the European Union. The EU and key member states' over-reliance on Russia's gas worked as a cautionary tale of the dangers of dependence on critical supply chains in East Asia, from semiconductors to key commodities. That, along with the EU's ambition to level the economic playing field vis-a-vis China, infused the US-EU TTC with momentum, although European officials balked at American counterparts' sole emphasis on China, not to mention simmering competitive Transatlantic dynamics [*Internationale Politik Quarterly* 2022, 1 December].

In comparison, the deep net of US-Japan consultative and coordination avenues in the technology, economic and connectivity agendas symbolized much closer affinity and cooperation on substance. The Japan-U.S. Commercial and Industrial Partnership (JUCIP) was a key inter-governmental platform, and a springboard for the newly-inaugurated US-Japan Economic Security 2+2 meetings (between the U.S. Departments of Commerce and State along with Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Indus-

try and Ministry of Foreign Affairs), that provided substance to the US-Japan Competitiveness and Resilience (CoRe) Partnership launched in 2021 [The White House 2022a]. Japan and the EU announced a «Digital Partnership» in 2022 for the purpose of underwriting the EU's data protection GDPR standards and Japan's «data free flow with trust» principles [Ministry of Economy Trade and Industry 2022]. The partnership, however, lacked clear deliverables and in some ways resembled the 2021 EU-Japan «Green Alliance» and the 2019 EU-Japan connectivity partnership; it sounded like politics by sloganeering. Japan was, after all, a champion of infrastructure diplomacy, but its interests didn't easily align with European players and the EU [Murashkin and Varpahovskis 2022], which was also marred by bureaucratic in-fighting. Nevertheless, these forums do establish a set of framework agreements that could facilitate future collaboration—the 2019 connectivity partnership, for example, finally appears to be moving with a modicum of coordinated activities planned for South-East Asia in 2023.

Much more substantial cooperation and coordination was taking place between Japan, the United States and Australia in the South Pacific, to deny a Chinese sphere of influence while propping up Australia's own influence – not all together unlike Japan's efforts in India's neighbourhood [Insisa & Pugliese 2022]. Through old and newly inaugurated investment and infrastructure ententes, the three states' policy banks propped up Australia's financing of Digicel Pacific, «the telecommunications operator in the Pacific, with over 2.5 million subscribers in Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Vanuatu, Samoa, Tonga and Nauru» [The White House 2022d]. Through the Trilateral Infrastructure Partnership, the three players also showed support for important infrastructure in the region, including the East Micronesia Cable and an undersea cable for Palau. The partnership aimed at targeting projects where joint investment would have provided alternatives to Beijing's capital and influence. This was not limited to the Western Pacific, because the three players were showing an expansive remit in South-East Asia, all the way to Vietnam [Japan Bank for International Cooperation 2021]. South-East Asia remained Japan's key destination for connectivity and infrastructure diplomacy, because it was at the crucible of economic, political and strategic considerations [Wallace 2013; Yoshimatsu 2017; Zappa 2021].

Moreover, the United States and Australia agreed to increase the rotation of US military assets through military bases «Down Under» while inviting Japan to participate in «Force Postures Initiatives in Australia» [U.S. Department of State 2022b]. Indeed, following Beijing's announcement in Spring 2022 that it would dock ships and allow security forces to be deployed in the Solomon Islands, the United States and like-minded players inaugurated a Partners in the Blue Pacific initiative with Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom to thwart Chinese activity in the region [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2022c]. This was yet another new mini-lateral coalition. China was the *de facto* elephant in the room.

How did Japan's business sector respond to US-China tech and economic rivalry? While public commentaries in Japan expressed concern about the repercussions for Japan's economic competitiveness due to Japan's technology powerhouses' exposure to the Chinese market [*Nihon Keizai Shinbun* 2022, 27 October], first-hand interviews in Tokyo suggested that Japanese policymakers agreed with the logic behind the US government's decision and were effectively onboard, although they wouldn't like Japanese companies to be caught in the crossfire [Interviews 2022d]. Preliminary reports suggest that Japan's manufacturers of advanced electrical machinery suffered from lower Chinese demand due to export controls as well as Chinese indigenization and import substitution [*Nikkei Asia* 2021, 31 August]. Japan External Trade Organization statistics, however, showed that Japanese direct investment in China increased between 2021 and 2022, although recent figures pale in comparison with those dating back only ten years ago [Japan External Trade Organization 2022].

The American approach clashes with a set of competing economic and political interests. As a consequence, close coordination among «techno-democracies [to] pass the tech test together [and] pushback against the horrors of techno-autocracies», in Secretary of State Anthony Blinken's own words [Blinken 2021], will be stunted. Firstly, American multinational enterprises and the rest of the world will likely continue doing business with China. Secondly, Washington's techno-economic initiatives have clearly moved towards wielding negative incentives and embryonic forms of unilateral cooperation that have yet to reveal their true potential. Thirdly, under both Trump and Biden administrations, the US government altogether abandoned its traditional trade liberalization agenda, one that had allowed for access to the rich American market *and* for US global influence since the end of World War II. Yet given the degree of interdependence, it is still difficult to foresee Washington's being able to contain China's economic expansion and, especially, its technological development in any way like it did the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

More importantly, unilateral initiatives and industrial policies, such as those embedded in the Inflation Reduction Act, the Chips Act, and the US-led ICT consortium based on Open-Radio Access Network technology, suggest that protectionism was a constant. Europe is also not exempt from similar industrial policies (e.g., the EU's Chips Act) or unilateralist and protectionist proposals.<sup>7</sup>

Echoing such global trends was Japan's insistence on «strategic autonomy» and «strategic indispensability» in its economic security efforts, which include the importance of secret Japan-registered patents, massive

7. One example is the European Commission's initiative for rules requiring companies to respect human rights and the environment in global value chains with potentially hefty turnover penalties for multinationals operating on EU soil and found to be in breach [Council of the EU 2022].

state incentives and a further tightening of investment screening and export controls. It would thus be mistaken to see China's «dual circulation» in a vacuum – in fact, from Beijing's point of view, its own initiatives were aimed at «levelling the playing field» by emulation and a tighter embrace of *dirigisme*. It remains to be seen how such competitive and protectionist winds would fare vis-à-vis Japan's multilateral trade agenda, notable through its efforts within the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) as well as the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Still, experts agreed that it was a dire time for international trade: public announcements aside, the 2022 World Trade Organization Ministerial Meeting witnessed a complete deadlock. The Japanese government even signalled its low expectation of success by sending a lesser delegation to this meeting, thereby prioritizing the upper house elections.

While the Japanese government was reportedly unhappy with the underwhelming US-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework presented during the May 2022 Quad Summit in Tokyo [The White House 2022b], there were some notable security-related developments. The newly unveiled Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) initiative was aimed at illegal fishing, although it essentially meant monitoring China's naval and para-military activities, a mission and discourse that gained new saliency in recent years [Dell'Era 2022]. The initiative will facilitate the sharing of information, hardware and software among littoral states interested in enhancing their maritime domain awareness [FNN 2022, 26 May]. This represents a new front for Quad members to coordinate their development aid and consequently challenge China's sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific region. The deepening of economic, technological and governance cooperation, coupled with the prospect of involving non-Quad countries such as South Korea or European players in these areas of collaboration, suggested that the Quad had evolved markedly as the mini-lateral tendency gained further steam in 2022.

## 6. *Japan's most substantive defence overhaul since the 1980s*

Around the world, political actors prepared for an even more unstable future by enhancing their national security and defence strategies. For example, the European Union and NATO respectively embraced a Strategic Compass and a new Strategic Concept in 2022, and Germany was reportedly considering its first-ever post-war National Security Strategy [European Union External Action 2022; Federal Foreign Office 2022; North Atlantic Treaty Organization 2022]. Tokyo followed suit by revising three major security documents and announcing a new budget in late-2022 that collectively portend more robust internal balancing efforts.

Prime Minister Kishida announced in late-2021 that he would spend his political capital in 2022 on revising Japan's three key national security documents with a view to «fundamentally bolstering» Japan's defence capabilities to supplement enhancements of Japan's external balancing shepherded through during the Abe administration [Sugiyama 2021, 6 December]. Given Kishida's commitments to both internal party supporters and Japan's alliance partner, there was considerable pressure on the prime minister to realize more than incremental changes in Japan's internal balancing approach. During the year-long process of reviewing Japan's basic defence settings, the prime minister was, however, greatly assisted by events in Ukraine and surrounding Taiwan. Sentiment regarding Japan's defence posture changed considerably in response to Putin's war, as the Japanese public became more permissive on issues of long-standing controversy such as counterattack capabilities and increasing the defence budget (see below). In mid-December, Prime Minister Kishida delivered what *potentially* could be the most substantive overhaul of Japan's defence capabilities since the 1980s with the publication of new priorities – and identification of resources to fund them – in three key documents summarized below.

Japan's first ever revision to the National Security Strategy (NSS) painted an even darker picture of regional developments than did the original NSS produced under former Prime Minister Abe [Ministry of Defense of Japan 2022a and 2022b; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2022d]. The 2022 NSS dispenses with scaffolding in the first few pages of the 2013 NSS that emphasized the continued importance of Japan's «Proactive Contribution to Peace» for Japan's diplomacy. The 2022 iteration straightforwardly starts off by stating that Japan is «surrounded by an increasingly severe security environment and confronted by complex and grave national security challenges» [Government of Japan 2013]. In the same first paragraph the NSS continues that «We are reminded once again that globalization and interdependence alone cannot serve as a guarantor for peace and development across the globe» and that «confrontation and cooperation are intricately intertwined in international relations» [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2022d; Wallace 2021a].<sup>8</sup> While the NSS refers to the «opportunities and benefits» of wide-ranging global engagement and inherits language from the 2013 document regarding the increasing importance of the Indo-Pacific region as the «center of gravity of global power», it also notes that currently unfolding geopolitical changes will «carry on over the medium-to-long term and [...] have historical consequences that will transform the nature of the international community».

8. Tokyo's new language reflects the darkening outlook of some other Japanese partners in the «Asia-Pacific» who had previously retained an optimistic stance to international cooperation and multilateralism but have subsequently adopted Japan's more pessimistic «Indo-Pacific» mini-lateral framing in their national security strategies.



China, North Korea, and Russia are all unsurprisingly identified as presenting even greater challenges than they did in 2013 [*Jiji News* 2022, 16 December]. At the same time, the 2022 NSS laments the weakness of two key pillars of the post-WWII order. Regarding the United States, the 2013 NSS notes that «though its relative influence in the international community is changing», the United States retained commitment and strength as exemplified by its national security and economic policy shift «towards the Asia-Pacific region (the ‘rebalance’ policy)» [Government of Japan 2013].<sup>9</sup> The 2022 NSS, however, notes in its first mention of American foreign policy (not until page 5) that «it is becoming increasingly difficult for the United States...to manage risks in the international community and to maintain and develop a free and open international order» [The White House 2022c].<sup>10</sup>

In the next sentence, the NSS then expresses a profound lack of confidence in the second pillar – the United Nations (UN). It laments that the UN «should embody the will of the international community at large» but has been undermined by some of its foundational members and «thus has not fully lived up fulfilling its function» [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2022d: 4, 15, 28]. While the UN featured significantly in the 2013 NSS, it is barely mentioned in the 2022 NSS.<sup>11</sup> While doubts about the United States’ ability to ensure Japanese and regional security are not new [Samuels & Wallace 2018], the language pertaining to the UN is noteworthy. Japan’s own post-war «peace constitution» symbolically reflects the language and ideals of the United Nations Charter as the recovering nation placed its «trust in the justice and faith of the peace-loving peoples of the world» in order to achieve its security [Constitution of Japan]. The UN also featured prominently in Japan’s initial post-war «Basic Defence Policy» in 1957. Adopted by the National Defense Council and the Cabinet on May 20, 1957, the policy outlines four essential components of Japan’s national defence. The first includes «supporting the activities of the United Nations, promoting international collaboration, and thereby, making a commitment to the realization of world peace». The fourth component was «dealing with exter-

9. On page 6, the 2013 NSS also shared that the «U.S. remains the country that has the world’s largest power as a whole, composed of its soft power originating from its values and culture, on top of its military and economic power».

10. While framed differently, this evaluation appears to be shared by the United States itself given the opening words of its own principal strategic document: «We are now in the early years of a decisive decade for America and the world».

11. Significantly, the 2022 NSS does not contain a stand-alone section to Japan’s «proactive contribution to international efforts for peace and stability of the international community» which started by situating the importance of «strengthening diplomacy at the United Nations» as the 2013 NSS did. Instead, the 2022 NSS lists strengthening the Japan-US alliance as the first item in its proactive peace diplomacy efforts with cooperation with «like-minded countries» that support a «free and open international order» listed second.

nal aggression based on the security arrangements with the U.S. until the United Nations will be able to fulfil its function in stopping such aggression effectively in the future» [Ministry of Defense of Japan 2023b]. This UN-centrism faded somewhat during the Cold War but enjoyed a revival in the mid-1990s and early 2000s among some politicians and norm entrepreneurs in Japan. Japan's endeavours to join the UN Security Council as a permanent member also featured as an important part of Japan's post-war national identity as a country that sought to make a peaceful «international contribution» [Yasui 2010]. Therefore, Tokyo's forthright expression of its concerns about the UN in addition to unease about the United States is indicative of a much more pessimistic Japan «finding itself in the midst of the most severe and complex security environment since the end of WWII» [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2022e].

The renaming of the National Defence Program Guidelines (NDPG) also reflected Tokyo's geopolitical apprehensions and was also symbolic in its own right – the NDPG was effectively transformed into Japan's first ever «National Defense Strategy» (NDS). The NDPG was originally formulated in 1976, but its role was «not to clarify defense strategy» so much as to provide guidelines about the kind of defence force Japan would furnish itself with within the limits placed on «defense capabilities amid the Detente situation during the Cold War» [Ogi 2022, 20 December]. Ogi, a former high ranking Japanese defence official, further notes that while the 2013 NSS identified the direction for Japan's national security strategy, «it kept silent on crystallizing a defense strategy» [*Ibid.*]. However, Ogi expects the NDS «to guide and integrate specific defense build-up plans with a clear defense strategy that Japan must aim for».

The NDS also represented the final decisive break from the defence logic that animated the first NDPG. The 1976 NDPG was formulated based on the «Basic Defense Force Concept» that envisioned Japan retaining a static defence force configured to «repel limited and small-scale aggression» while waiting for external assistance to deal with a wider conflict. As such, Japan's defence capabilities did not need to directly mirror the capabilities of potential adversaries or seek to deal with specific threats that adversary capabilities posed – a notion described as «Beyond-the-Threat theory» (*dai-su-kyoi-ron* or 脱脅威論). Essentially, the regional military balance did not directly guide Japan's defence planning as it remained firmly ensconced and subordinate within the US-Japan alliance framework and Japanese planners painstakingly avoided stoking a regional security dilemma along «defensive realist» principles [Midford 2010]. The NDS itself on page 9 states that Japan's defence objectives after 1976 were primarily not to «counter specific threats, [but] to avoid Japan becoming a destabilizing factor in the region by creating a power vacuum».

The 2010 NDPG was the first to openly question the validity of this idea in the changing geopolitical environment as it signalled the begin-

ning of Japan's movement to «dynamic deterrence, which takes into account [...] the operational use of the defense forces» [Government of Japan 2010]. The NDS, however, is rhetorically explicit in making the case for Japan's defence capability planning to return to the «Required Defence Force Concept» of the pre-1976 period [Chijiwa 2016a]. This concept was based on «counter-threat theory» harkening back to the early Meiji era «where Japan determines the level of its defence force according to the strength of a [potential] enemy» [*Ibid.* p. 85]. Taking into account the rapidity and substance of change in the international environment, Japan's new NDS makes it clear that «Japan's future defense capability will focus on such opponent's capabilities and way of warfare and will be fundamentally reinforced to defend itself more than ever» [Ministry of Defense of Japan 2022a: 9].

Following suit, the Medium-Term Defence Plan was also renamed – becoming the «Defense Build-up Program» (DBP).<sup>12</sup> This language also echoed the pre-1976 period when Japan used five-year defence «build-up» plans to expand the SDF's quantitative size in addition to its qualitative capabilities [Chijiwa 2016a: 86]. In 1970, Japan published its first ever defence white paper as then defence chief Nakasone Yasuhiro proposed a further doubling of real defence spending (as the third DBP had achieved) for the fourth DBP. This would push Japan's defence spending back over 1 percent of GDP and Japan further along in building an «autonomous defence» (*jishu bōei*) capability. Nakasone's «grand design» envisioned Japan becoming primarily responsible for its own defence and able to secure air and sea superiority around Japan. At the same time, this vision would relegate the alliance to a secondary role for Japan's defence even as the United States retained primary responsibility for regional security and deterrence by punishment [Envall 2008].<sup>13</sup> The final of four build-up plans was, however, almost immediately abandoned in 1972 as Japan's engagement with China deepened following Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei's visit to Beijing, facilitated by broader US-China détente and the quiet enlisting of China against the Soviet Union. Thus, in 1976, the build-up approach was substituted with a more incremental annual approach to defence spending that would ensure expenditure remained under 1 percent of GDP for the purpose of maintaining a «peacetime defence force» capable of full surveillance and «coping effectively with situations *up to the point* of limited and small-scale aggression» (authors' emphasis) [Chijiwa 2016b: 133; Cho 2021; Green & Murata 1998].<sup>14</sup>

12. The official English translation is Defence Build-up Program while the Japanese name for this document is similar to «Defence Capability Enhancement Program». See here for comparison: <https://www.mod.go.jp/j/policy/agenda/guideline/index.html>.

13. Nakasone had become more alliance-centric by the time he ascended to the premiership in the 1980s.

14. The 1 percent cap on GDP was formalized in 1976 with a cabinet decision.

### 7. Japan's fifth Defence Build-up Program

The new DBP together with Japan's draft 2023 defence budget made it clear that Japan is embarking on a «Fifth DBP» after a 50-year hiatus that planners hope will ensure Japan can do more than just repel small-scale aggression on its own. Despite incremental increases in the defence budget during the Abe administration, major external and internal pressures on Japan's defence budget resulted in military experts and even Japan's strategic partners asking questions about the long-term effectiveness of the SDF as a warfighting force [*Asia Times* 2020, 30 June; Center for Security Policy 2022; Newsham 2020, 30 June]. External pressures include the enhancement of Chinese and North Korean capabilities and increasing willingness to demonstrate – and perhaps use – these capabilities; the quickly evolving nature of modern military technology (described as «new ways of warfare» in the NDS); and the increase in operational tempo forced on the SDF due to various overseas commitments made by the government and increasing military activity around Japan. The 2022 crisis in Ukraine therefore only added to the sense that external developments will increasingly burden the SDF. Many internal pressures, such as increasing maintenance costs, foreign military hardware purchases, and the weak yen, also weighed on the effectively stagnant defence budget, meaning that it actually purchased less warfighting capacity over time [Wallace 2020]. Without a robust increase in expenditure in various areas, Japan's actual military capability and capacity would decrease over time despite incremental nominal spending increases and high-tech weapon purchases.

Signs of gathering political momentum to address such problems were detectable during the 2021 LDP leadership race [Wallace 2021b and 2021c]. However, it became clear in mid-2022 that the 2023 budget would not be business as usual. The *honebuto no hōshin* (fiscal policy guidelines) not only referenced the 2% of GDP military spending target recommended for NATO nations, but it also included unprecedented language that committed the government to a «drastic strengthening of defense capabilities within the next five years». Importantly, this language was only included due to significant pressure from LDP parliamentarians who were dissatisfied with an earlier draft that did not mention a specific time frame [Fee & Johnson 2022, 7 June]. Kishida was also aware of external expectations from its strategic partners to make substantive increases in spending. The Japanese public also seemed open to the idea of substantive changes. Throughout 2022, 32 media agency surveys touched upon this topic: 21 surveys showed majority support for robust defence spending increase, six showed plurality support, and only five showed opposition [Wallace 2023].

With this tailwind, on December 23 the Japanese Ministry of Defense (MOD) released a draft overview of the fiscal 2023 Budget subtitled «The First Year of the Fundamental Reinforcement of Japan's Defence Capabili-

ties» [Ministry of Defense of Japan 2022c]. Including supplementary budgets, defence spending will rise from JP¥5.8 trillion in 2022 to JP¥6.8 trillion in 2023 – an increase of 17% – the highest year-on-year nominal increase since 1974. By 2027, Tokyo plans to spend JP¥8.9 trillion annually on defence – 53% higher than the 2022 level. By 2027, Japan’s defence spending will increase from 1.09% of GDP in 2022 to between 1.5% and 1.6% of GDP using the government’s traditional method of calculating defence-related expenditure. This is the highest level since the 1950s. Using the NATO calculation method, which includes spending such as coast guard expenditure and contributions to the United Nations Peacekeeping budget, Japan’s «security-related» spending will increase from 1.24% of GDP in 2021 to between 1.8% and 2% of GDP in 2027. Defence spending as a proportion of government spending will pass 6% for the first time since the early 2000s and eventually reach 7.5% by 2027 – the highest level since the late-1960s.<sup>15</sup> As a total pool of money, the expected appropriations for the MOD based on the 5<sup>th</sup> DBP for 2023-2027 will reach JP¥43.5 trillion, an increase of 58% compared to the 2018-2022 period under the previous Medium Term Defense Plan.

This collectively reflects Tokyo’s most substantive fiscal commitment to Japan’s defence in 40 years. Beyond the headline numbers, Tokyo signalled it would increase the amount dedicated to maintenance costs by 86% while more than doubling spending on ammunition replenishment, defence-specific research and development, defence industry strengthening measures, SDF infrastructure (including base hardening), and measures to enhance the working conditions of recruits [Ministry of Finance of Japan 2022]. It appears that Tokyo politicians have heeded expert critiques of SDF force readiness and «combat sustainability» [*Reuters* 2022, 16 December].

Ultimately, however, one element stood out above the others in media commentary: Tokyo’s explicit acknowledgement of the need for a foreign territory strike capability. After almost two decades of discussion about whether to embrace this agenda, the rapid pace of missile testing and acquisition over the last five years in East Asia accelerated the Japanese policy debate. The embrace of foreign territory strike capabilities through the acquisition of stand-off weapons, therefore, was not a sudden development [Pugliese and Maslow 2020; Wallace 2021d]. Rather than Chinese or North Korean actions, however, it was Russia’s naked aggression in Ukraine that paved the way for smooth public acceptance of this «policy option» despite prior preferences for restraint. Out of the 28 opinion polls taken by media agencies during 2022, 20 found a majority in favour of some kind of foreign territory strike capability if framed as a self-defence «counterattack» to an already initiated attack [Wallace 2023].

15. All calculations were made by the authors based on documents from the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Finance of Japan.

Labelled «counterattack» capabilities in Japan's new security documentation, the government identified plans to accelerate the acquisition of various types of stand-off weapons that could provide the SDF with options to strike foreign military installations as a complement to BMD systems [Wallace 2021d].<sup>16</sup> The documents are careful to rule out pre-emptive use by explicitly limiting attacks in an «opponent's area» (*aite no ryōiki ni*相手の領域に) to «restrict opponent's missile launches» after an attack has already initiated [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2022d: 19]. Nevertheless, these capabilities in the future could allow Japan to «target military facilities deep in an adversary's territory, reinforcing deterrence by raising the cost of aggression against Japan» and potentially force Pyongyang and Beijing to redirect investment into their own defences [Hornung & Johnstone 2023].

Unsurprising given their long-held symbolic significance in conservative Japanese political circles [Wallace 2021d], the DBP proposes acquiring Tomahawks cruise missiles to fill the short-term void in Japan's stand-off capabilities. Tokyo will also accelerate range extension of Japan's own domestically produced anti-ship missiles to beyond 1000 kilometres, essentially meaning that Japan will possess «indigenous Tomahawks» in the future [*Sankei Shinbun* 2020, 29 December]. The currently truck-launched Type-12 anti-ship missile will be extended and also launchable from ships, aircraft, as well as from submarines. The submarine option is arguably the most potent platform for implementing foreign territory strike given the advantages of concealment, and the Japanese government plans to install Vertical Launching System modules on Japan's «Reiwa Submarines» to greatly enhance the firepower and range for both counterattack and traditional anti-ship operations [*Mainichi Shinbun* 2022a, 13 December]. Tokyo also accelerated its investment in the development of indigenous hypersonic «elemental technologies» such as SCRAM-jet propulsion for hypersonic missiles and hard-to-intercept hyper velocity boost-glide vehicles (ostensibly for «island defence») that will mature in the 2030s.

To be sure, the possession of stand-off capabilities is not necessarily synonymous with a primary operational focus on striking an enemy's territory. In the «Key Capabilities for Reinforcement» section of the NDS, stand-off capabilities are mentioned first. However, the whole section is dedicated to outlining the primary and immediate value of stand-off capabilities for dealing with «vessels and landing forces invading Japan» [Ministry of Defense of Japan 2022a: 23]. Noting that Japan's significant maritime and aerial domain spans 3,000 kilometres in all directions, extended range provides greater tactical options for defence or denial in depth in addition to foreign territory strike applications focused on missile defence [*Ibid.*]. Enhanced range will, after all, provide options for deploying diversified launch sys-

16. Stand-off missiles can strike distant targets and are launched from air, sea, subsurface or land-based platforms outside the range of close-in air defences.

tems throughout the first and second island chains to frustrate PRC attempts to achieve sea control and hold land taken from Japan, especially as other locations in Japan offer greater opportunities for concealment and system mobility than Okinawa. Even the extended Type-12's primary function will for the time being remain as an anti-ship missile for raising the costs of military adventurism at «Japan's forefront line of defense» around Miyakojima [Fujiwara 2019, 30 April]. At least for the 2020s, Japan's stand-off weapons will remain primarily of significance for maritime denial as a valuable component of Japan's «version of the A2/AD» while providing more options for defence-in-depth [Jimbo 2023, 26 January; Murakami 2023, 31 January].

There is also significant potential for delay and the timetable for development, deployment, and authorization of the use of these weapons even in a semi-autonomous capacity could lengthen into the 2030s. In addition to technical communications issues already identified around the Type-12, there is the need to create new command systems. In the past, the three services of the SDF could get away with operating in essentially different geographic realms. This was already sub-optimal, but with enhanced power projection capabilities, the potential for overlapping use of airspace, target redundancy, operational interference, and even friendly fire incidents (within the SDF and when operating with American forces) are going to become even more critical issues for Tokyo to solve if stand-off weapons are to have deterrent value intended [Sakaguchi 2022, 19 December]. Japan's problems with jointness, bureaucratic stove-piping, inter-service communications, and the lack of a permanent joint command during peacetime to ensure the SDF can operate effectively during a contingency are already well-known [*Ibid.*; Makino 2022b, 27 April; Mulloy 2021; Ogi 2022]. Integration of stand-off missiles and ISR capabilities together with planned new SDF capabilities in the space, cyber, and the electromagnetic realms will require the integration of joint operations to an even higher level of sophistication [Ogi 2023]. While Japan has announced an intention to create a joint command, it is unclear whether it will also result in an overhaul of the SDF services themselves to streamline them for communications and command purposes. Even then, the standing up of a joint command is expected to take five years to complete. It is expected to mature in 2027 when Japan will establish a rapid-response system with a focus on responding to a potential Taiwan contingency [Miki 2022, October 29; Nemoto 2022, September 29]. In the meantime, the various services will continue to proliferate units with parallel responsibilities [Nemoto 2022, 13 December], and the so-called «kill chain» for strike capabilities will be distributed across each of the services before the joint command institution is fully fleshed out. There is still no evidence of integrated operations being the focus from the outset of force planning and posture design and this likely means a substantial increase in complexity when the SDF was already struggling with joint operations.

Mr. Kishida must also progress the 2023 budget and legislative change to the SDF Law in order to implement some of the planned changes. For streamlining and centralizing organizational command structures, substantial changes to the SDF Law will be required even before looking at legal changes to enable foreign territory strike missions. Counterattack capabilities could still become politically problematic despite seeming public acceptance of the framing that they are a supplement to BMD and not for pre-emptive purposes. In the 8 of the 28 surveys mentioned above where only a plurality favoured a strike capability or respondents were opposed, the wording was more generic and focused on «enemy base attack». This suggests that parliamentary deliberation in the future could still agitate the public if a strong connection is made between this capability and pre-emptive strike, if the opposition interrogates the government on whether the new mission would allow the SDF to strike Chinese command centres and military bases in the event of a Taiwan conflict, and/or if the new power projection capabilities raises collective self-defence issues as Japanese and American naval and aerial units increasingly integrate on-board systems and fire control through «Cooperative Engagement Capability» enhancement [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2022d: 20; Wallace 2021d].<sup>17</sup> Public opinion, especially if Kishida struggles to become a long-term prime minister, could still intervene to complicate the implementation of Japan's ambitious defence overhaul.

### 8. *A nuclear next step?*

Nevertheless, these new weapons afford Japan increasing strategic flexibility should Tokyo desire greater «strategic independence» in the future [Honrada 2023, 28 January; Samuels & Wallace 2018]. Perhaps the ultimate symbol of strategic independence would be an evolution in Japan's approach to nuclear weapons. Various analysts have argued that, given the overwhelming conventional and nuclear strength of Japan's adversaries in the region, the only true option for deterrence by punishment is the acquisition of nuclear weapons [Makino 2022b]. Japanese media reports in 2022 noted that in South Korea opinion towards Seoul's possession of nuclear weapons had turned decidedly more positive as North Korea's own nuclear

17. To this end, the 2022 NSS (p.20) acknowledges that Japan's new weaponry will allow the SDF to deepen its regional cooperation on the counterattack elements of Integrated Air and Missile Defence with the United States much in the same way it has with on interceptor-focused BMD. It is careful, however, to assert that the basic division of roles between the United States and Japan will remain unchanged (for now) in terms of overall disposition and responsibility for regional security—the United States leading from the front with the ability to inflict considerable punishment with Japan providing point defence and support.



potential became clear [*BBC News* 2022, 9 September; Borowiec 2022, 29 November; Dalton *et al.* 2022; Makino 2022a]. While moving straight towards independent acquisition of nuclear weapons is unrealistic for Tokyo, not for the first time in Japan's post-war history Japanese commentators and politicians mulled the possibility of Japan hosting nuclear weapons to deter potential Chinese coercion as an intermediate move [Wallace 2021d: 49-52]. In 2022, former Prime Minister Abe, LDP policy chief Takaichi Sanae, and Ishin no Kai party leaders called for a debate on nuclear sharing and/or allowing the United States to station nuclear warheads in Japan [*Asahi Shinbun* 2022b, 3 March; *Nikkei Asia* 2022, 3 March; *Sankei Shinbun* 2022, 2 March; Wingfield-Hayes 2022, 26 March].<sup>18</sup>

This is a particularly tricky issue for Kishida given his family history, electoral constituency in Hiroshima and his self-representation as a pacifist with particular emphasis on non-proliferation and support for a ban on nuclear weapons [*Nippon.com* 2023, 4 January; *Tokyo Shinbun* 2022, 28 February]. In August 2022, Kishida became the first Japanese prime minister to address the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference to «highlight his enthusiastic commitment to nuclear issues». Kishida also plans to use the 2023 G7 summit to showcase his anti-nuclear credentials by agitating for a «world without nuclear weapons» while connecting this agenda to Russia's aggression, implied threats to use nuclear weapons, and «attempts to overthrow the international order» [Kaiya 2022, 23 July].

Therefore, the Kishida administration quickly swatted away the suggestion of a change in Japan's nuclear posture. Prime Minister Kishida noted that it would violate the 1955 Basic Atomic Energy Law, Japan's 1967 three Non-Nuclear Principles, and international law (the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty) [*Mainichi Shinbun* 2022, 25 February].<sup>19</sup> Nuclear sharing was also likely to be opposed by Japanese citizens [*Sankei Shinbun* 2022, 21 March]. Despite expectations that the nuclear allergy would weaken over time, there has been very little movement in terms of public opinion towards embracing such an option since the 1960s when the issue was raised following China's 1964 detonation of a nuclear bomb [*Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament (JPAND)* 2018, 13 July]. Indeed, an authoritative voice from Japan's national security establishment, one that was an early proponent of endowing Japan with strike capabilities, lamented hawkish calls for a debate on nuclear sharing in the aftermath of war in Ukraine, calling them a fantasy of «utopian realists» [Interview 2022e].

There also appeared to be a misunderstanding of what nuclear sharing in the NATO context actually is. Rather than the sharing of strategic

18. Prominent LDP politician Takaichi Sanae even argued that Japan could not be defended unless the United States was allowed to transport nuclear weapons through Japanese territory.

19. The three non-nuclear principles commit Japan to «not manufacture or possess nuclear weapons or allow their introduction into the country».

arsenals that would allow a country to deter through punishment, NATO sharing is predicated on deterrence by denial where American allies participate in the use of weapons to stop Soviet/Russian advancement into Europe itself, thereby sharing the «responsibilities and risks» [‘NATO’s Nuclear Sharing Arrangements’ 2022]. In the context of Japan’s geography, this would mean Japanese participation in the decision to use nuclear weapons on or around Japanese territory to destroy an invading force [Kuniuchi 2022, 6 June].<sup>20</sup> As NATO headquarters itself makes clear: «NATO’s nuclear sharing is the sharing of the Alliance’s nuclear deterrence mission and the related political responsibilities and decision-making. It is not the sharing of nuclear weapons». Unsurprisingly therefore, this iteration of the «nuclear debate» quickly vanished from public discourse. Nevertheless, the possibility of nuclear weapons use, which was implied by statements from President Putin in early 2022, raised concerns in Japan to the point that prominent politicians such as former defence minister Ishiba Shigeru raised the need to proliferate nuclear shelters—something Japan lacks «compared to the North America and Europe» as Japan can only accommodate 0.02% of its population in these shelters [*FNN Premium Online*, 2022, 1 May; Kitamura 2022, 11 September].

### 9. *Regional reactions to Japan’s defence changes*

The most vociferous regional reaction to the three new security documents and the prominence of counterattack operations in these documents came from North Korea. Pyongyang described Japan’s new defence direction as a «wrong and dangerous choice» that constituted a «new aggression policy» and would fundamentally change East Asia’s security environment. North Korea also warned against Japan’s designs on «re-invasion» [Choi 2022, 20 December]. North Korea then tested missiles five times in the first two weeks after the release of the new documents. However, given that North Korea tested over 95 missiles on 35 different days during 2022, it is hard to ascribe these tests to Japan’s revised security documents and Tokyo’s embrace of stand-off capabilities.

In Beijing, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson unsurprisingly expressed displeasure at Japan’s description of China as Japan’s «biggest strategic challenge» in the NSS. Wang Wenbin lamented Japan deviating «from its commitment to China-Japan relations and the common understandings between the two countries» [*Mainichi Shinbun* 2022, 17 Decem-

20. Takahashi Sugio makes this point clear: «The nuclear sharing framework was therefore formed to allow the use of tactical nuclear weapons against invading forces to ‘offset’ the advantage possessed by Soviet forces, thereby deterring invasion in the first place. The framework essentially made European allies partially responsible for the use of nuclear weapons on European soil».

ber]. The PRC embassy in Tokyo lodged a diplomatic protest condemning Tokyo for «stirring up tension and confrontation in the region» [Kyodo News 2022, 17 and 27 December]. On December 27, «scheduling difficulties» forced the postponement of an anticipated meeting between the foreign ministers of both countries. However, it is also worth acknowledging that December 27 was the same day that Japan announced new restrictions on the entry of visitors from China into Japan, which also invited major Chinese criticism. Together with China's struggles with keeping COVID-19 under control after the abrupt cessation of its «Zero-COVID» policy in response to domestic discontent, it is likely that other developments factored in the cancellation [Johnson 2023, 29 January]. After all, a long meeting was held in August between National Security Secretariat Director Akiba Takeo and then State Councillor Yang Jiechi (who outranked the then-Foreign Minister Wang Yi) on Japan-China security issues [Nakazawa 2022, 25 August]. This likely involved Akiba appraising Yang of the content of the draft versions of the three security documents. Subsequent to this, Prime Minister Kishida and President Xi Jinping still met in Bangkok in November on the side-lines of APEC.

Probably the most surprising response came from Seoul. Following a meeting in October, top foreign affairs officials from South Korea, Japan, and the United States agreed to «strengthen deterrence in reining in the North Korean military threat» [Kyodo News 2022, 26 October]. In November, President Yoon then indicated that South Korea would be somewhat accepting of Japan's defence reforms when he suggested that changes in Japan's defence policy were an understandable response to the North Korean threat [Nakamura 2022, 30 December], a sentiment he later repeated after the publication of the three security documents [Kim 2023, 12 January]. South Korea also announced that it would take part in MSDF fleet review to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the MSDF despite protests from domestic politicians against the continued use of the «rising sun» ensign on MSDF vessels that had prevented both countries' navies from participating at their previous respective fleet reviews [*The Asahi Shimbun* 2022, 28 October]. Immediately following the release of the documents, South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that it was watching Japan's defence spending debate and did not object to Japan possessing counter-strike capabilities other than to insist that Tokyo consult with Seoul before using such capabilities on the Korean Peninsula; lack of said consultations may hypothetically entrap South Korea in military escalations of Tokyo's making, although the prospect is rather distant given Japan's dependence on American logistical support for targeting purposes.

On December 28, the ROK government also announced its own Indo-Pacific strategy. The use of the Indo-Pacific nomenclature reflected the diplomatic language of Abe Shinzō, but it is worth noting that President Yoon Suk-yeol commissioned the document from the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs' North America Affairs Bureau, thus denoting the US link. Still, the document contained a number of positive references to cooperation «with our closest neighbor, Japan». Desiring «a forward-looking partnership that supports our common interests and values», Seoul notes that «Improved relations with Japan is essential for fostering cooperation and solidarity among like-minded Indo-Pacific nations; we are thus continuing our diplomatic efforts to restore mutual trust and advance relations» [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea 2022]. Finally, on December 30 in Seoul, President Yoon met with Yamaguchi Natsuo, the leader of Komeito, a member of the ruling coalition, to discuss Japan-South Korea relations. At the meeting, the South Korean President urged closer security cooperation between South Korea and Japan [Nakamura 2022, 30 December].

Unsurprisingly, the United States welcomed Japan's new National Security Strategy and commitment to regional security. The almost contemporaneous release of these strategic documents suggested strong coordination between the Transpacific allies, especially within the context of the Japan-US Security Consultative Committee (aka Japan-US 2+2). This was in line with the Biden administration's emphasis on so-called «integrated deterrence». This concept encompassed jointness across the different military services, joint warfighting across domains, intra-agency coordination for «whole of government» responses and «seamless» cooperation, including joint strategic planning and military operations with allies [U.S. Department of Defense 2022]. According to Jimbo, this approach combines «deterrence by denial, deterrence by resilience and deterrence by direct and collective cost imposition» that represents «a structural shift» in emphasis from a singular focus on «deterrence by punishment» at least for conventional warfare [Jimbo 2023, 26 January]. Punishment will remain the ultimate option but the defence strategy documents of both Japan and the United States place a greater emphasis on being able to asymmetrically undermine China's operational capacity in the region during conflict by targeting its vulnerabilities rather than focusing on «overpowering China with sea and air superiority». While not immediately required, a logical next step will be the revision of the US-Japan Defense Guidelines for only the third time since 1978 [Kyodo News 2022, 16 December].

While countries in Southeast Asia remained silent likely in consideration of not alienating either Japan or China, a number of other countries explicitly added welcoming voices in support of Japan's new security and defence strategies, including quasi-allies Australia and the United Kingdom, and India and Taiwan. Defence dialogues and cooperation continued without disruption and Japan continued to upgrade defence partnerships with Sweden, Italy, Israel, and Greece following the announcement [Associated Press 2023, 31 January; Kyodo News 2023, 11 January; *Mainichi Shinbun* 2022, 21 December; Martin 2023, 11 January]. The regional and global reaction would seem to validate Tokyo's belief outlined in the NDS

that «others also expect Japan to play a role commensurate to its national strength» [Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2022a: 3].

## 10. *Japan's domestic politics in 2022*

Prime Minister Kishida Fumio entered 2022 riding high after victories in the LDP presidential election and House of Representatives election in late-2021. Domestically, Prime Minister Kishida experienced starkly different fortunes in the two halves of 2022. The first half was characterized by radically improving political fortunes. Despite coming out on top in the LDP presidential race and leading the LDP to a better-than-expected result in the 2021 House of Representatives election, expectations were not high for Kishida entering 2022. Compared to his predecessor, Suga Yoshihide, Kishida registered 14 percentage points on average less in net approval on becoming prime minister and registered less than 50 percent support in 5 out of 9 of the initial media survey polls [Wallace 2021c]. However, helped by the fiscal stimulus pushed through at the end of 2021, Kishida began a turnaround in political fortunes somewhat reminiscent of Kaifu and Obuchi in the 1990s who began with lacklustre approval ratings but battled back to respectable numbers. Assisted greatly by his robust response to the Ukraine crisis, by May 2022 the mean net support rate for the Kishida cabinet rose 12 percentage points higher compared to the inauguration of his cabinet [Wallace 2023]. This bucked the trend of new prime ministers starting with high expectations and quickly failing to meet them. The prime minister was therefore well positioned to face the public in the 2022 House of Councillors election. This would put an end to speculation that Kishida would be another one-year prime minister after Suga's downfall suggested that Abe's almost eight-year tenure was an aberration in the revolving door of Japanese prime ministers.

### 10.1 *2022 Upper House election*

On 10 July, 545 candidates competed for 125 seats in the 2022 House of Councillors election (hereafter, the upper house). Recent adjustments to electoral districts meant the ruling coalition needed to secure a majority of 125 seats (out of 248) to ensure legislation passes the upper house. Upper house elections have traditionally been challenging for the LDP, and no party had possessed a singular majority since 1986 [Nakayama & Odake 2022, 24 June]. Unlike the lower house, where more than 60% of seats are single member districts (SMDs) requiring only a plurality for victory, only 25% of upper house seats are SMDs, with the rest of the seats distributed through proportional representation or through multi-member electoral districts. With only half of the upper house's seats contested every three

years, the Japanese public has also traditionally been more willing to punish the main governing party in upper house elections [George Mulgan 2019, 17 July]. Furthermore, following its success in the 2021 lower house election, *Ishin no Kai* (hereafter *Ishin*) only increased its national prominence in 2022 and tried to outflank the government by strongly calling for tax cuts for small households and business owners to address the issue of rising costs [Tobita 2022, 18 June]. *Ishin* was expected to dominate in Osaka in the upper house election and pick up floating voters in the national proportional representation bloc. Together with the weak yen, COVID-19 and Ukraine war-related supply chain disruptions driving up imported food and energy inputs and domestic costs, [Maeda *et al.* 2022, 12 June], a repeat of the coordination of left-leaning candidates in the critical SMDs, which hurt the Abe administration in the previous upper house elections in 2016 and 2019, could have precipitated the LDP faltering and Kishida limping out of the election mortally wounded.

In the end, however, the LDP secured almost 90 percent of the SMD seats and increased the party's overall seat allotment by eight from the 2016 election when these seats were last contested. Kishida's LDP took 63 seats of the 125 seats on offer, the best result since the 2013 election under Abe. While the LDP was not able to secure an outright majority, it finished with 119 seats in total, the second highest total the LDP has had since 1986.

A number of factors meant that Kishida improved on the results of the 2016 and 2019 election. First, trade deals like the TPP no longer had the salience that they did in the rural SMD districts in the previous two elections when the LDP suffered notable losses [*Japan Times* 2019, 21 July]. Second, Prime Minister Kishida Fumio maintained high popularity ratings right up until the election. While LDP supporters were less enthusiastic about Kishida than Abe when Abe first returned to the premiership in 2012, Kishida was significantly more popular amongst unaffiliated voters and even opposition voters compared to both Abe and his predecessor Suga [*Asahi Shinbun* 2022, 10 June]. Kishida's messaging on redistribution also appeared to appeal to older voters, who are the larger and more political committed electorate in Japan [Miyasaka *et al.* 2022, 26 June]. Third, while *Ishin* did pick up some seats as expected [*Japan News* 2022, 28 August], the government was spared having to worry about the left-leaning opposition. In the two previous upper house elections a coordinated centre-left opposition performed above expectations to deprive the LDP of around one-third of the 32 SMD seats. The opposition was, however, less united in 2022, and even less popular than usual [Wallace 2023].

This owed to Kishida implementing a strategy to undercut the centre-left opposition while differentiating himself from Abe. In 2022, Kishida emphasized redistribution, wage increases for workers (including the minimum wage), and more proactively courted labour unions, including Japan's largest trade union confederation, Rengo. Rengo has been a major support-

er of the CDPJ following its precipitous drop in popular trust and popularity post-2012. However, Rengo's first female president, Yoshino Tomoko, immediately criticized the CDPJ for its proactive and failed cooperation with the Japan Communist Party in the 2021 lower house election after her appointment, calling it «ridiculous» [*Jiji News* 2021, 28 November]. The LDP wasted little time in pouncing on this sign of discord. Kishida met the labour union group early in 2022, the first time for a prime minister in almost a decade [*The Asahi Shimbun* 2022, 6 January]. Ms. Yoshino was also appointed to sit on a panel headed by Kishida to flesh out his idea of «a new form of capitalism» [*Ibid.*]. The Rengo head then attended a rare meeting at the LDP to discuss social security in April prior to the election [*Johnston* 2022, 12 May; *Kyodo News* 2022, 18 April]. The LDP under Kishida also noted in its upper house manifesto that it would commit to continuing dialogue with Rengo and other «friendly» labour unions.

Even after his victory in the upper house election, Kishida continued his outreach to Japanese workers by making it clear he would focus on realizing «substantive wage increases over inflation levels» that Japan was uncharacteristically experiencing [*Japan News* 2022, 16 September; Sugiura 2022, 18 March]<sup>21</sup> as the prime minister eyed the 2023 annual *shuntō* talks. He also said he would undertake labour market reforms to address the conditions of non-regular workers and facilitate reskilling of workers. Interestingly, Rengo, Keidanren (Japan's most prominent business federation), and the government appeared to be on the same page at the end of 2022 regarding the need to secure a good outcome for Japanese workers after years of friction and hectoring by Japanese leaders [*Kyodo News* 2022, 4 October; Miura & Aota 2022, 21 October; Okabe 2022, 3 November].

However, any public opinion bounce from this will not be realized until 2023, and despite Kishida's triumph at the polls at the upper house election, the second half of 2022 was a political disaster for the prime minister. The modest but still notable increase in the LDP's upper house majority should have consolidated Mr Kishida's authority within the LDP after the ruling party also performed better than expected in the 2021 lower house election. Mr Kishida did not have to contest another national election for three years, with the next election of importance for him – the LDP's presidential race – not for more than two more years. The Japanese media began to talk about «three golden years» where Kishida could deal with a variety of difficult issues such as inflation, energy, and defence [*Akiyama* 2022, 12 July]. This should have given the prime minister some leverage to push forward on policies that might otherwise have upset one faction or another in the LDP. However, the fallout from Abe's assassination dragged Kishida's popularity down in some unexpected ways.

21. The Rengo chief then decided to attend the funeral of Abe Shinzo despite the CDPJ's own refusal.

11. *Abe Shinzō's assassination*

On 8 July, the life of former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō was snuffed out by a lone wolf carrying a home-made gun. The killer shot at Mr. Abe during a rally in support of an LDP candidate for the upper house election. While Mr. Abe was rushed to hospital, he was announced dead later that day [NHK 2022, 10 July]. The murderer was immediately arrested and interrogated. Shock was felt by many in Japan where gun violence is rare, especially outside of the realms of organized crime. Due to Mr. Abe's record setting tenure as prime minister, global leaders also reacted with disbelief at the brutal attack [Dominguez 2022, 8 July].

Once the dust settled, it became clear that the gunman was motivated by personal enmity towards the former prime minister. Early reports suggested that he held «grudges against a religious organization...and Abe's closeness to it, not Abe's political beliefs» [Asahi Shinbun 2022, 8 July]. The murderer's familial history emerged, bringing to light that his mother had donated JP¥100 million in donations two decades ago to the Unification Church (officially known as the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification), plunging their family into poverty. The accused later confirmed that he targeted Abe because «he believed he was a supporter of the church, which he blamed for bankrupting his family» [McCurry 2022, 22 November].

A close look at the assassin's archived Tweets (before the account was suspended) suggested deep depression and societal estrangement.<sup>22</sup> His very first Tweet in 2019 (14 October) made the connection between Abe and the Unification Church – 14 October 2019: «The only thing I hate is the Unification Church. I don't care what happens to the Abe administration as a result». According to two 26 June tweets, he outlined his favourite phrase: «He has been dead for a long time. What we have now is a stone by the side of the road, full of disgust. The stone will not move until the heart deep within cries out in lamentation». Moreover, tweets revealed his fixation with the Unification Church and its ties with the LDP. Finally, a hint at his homicidal intentions came on June 23, when he vented that «I believe that Asahara style (terrorist gas sarin attacks) will come back sooner or later. If it is the way to settle this uncontrollable world, it may not be wrong. Ultimately, people can only learn from what they've tasted». In one instance, he also mentioned Sakakibara child murders incidents as a model [Twitter 2022]. Even the account name *silent hill 333*, a name borrowed from a popular video-game revolving around the lonely fight against monsters created by an evil cult, hints at his mission.

The media soon followed up on the link between Mr. Abe and the Unification Church, originally founded in South Korea in 1954. It was al-

22. Archived Twitter Handle of Abe Shinzō's murderer: [https://web.archive.org/web/20220717073227/https://twitter.com/333\\_hill/](https://web.archive.org/web/20220717073227/https://twitter.com/333_hill/)



ready an open secret that Abe's grandfather, post-war prime minister Kishi Nobusuke, helped the Unification Church establish a presence in Japan based on Kishi's and the Church's strongly shared anti-communism [*Nikkei Asia* 2022, 31 August]. The organization was rather too successful in its spiritual sales tactics, however, and in the 1980s it was reported that the Japanese branch of the organization was sending tens of billions of yen back to Korea where the Church was originally founded [*Ibid.*]. In response to the outrage over these revelations, the LDP distanced itself from the Church until it was dumped out of government at the 2009 election and the LDP became desperate for votes.

Abe did not attempt to hide some degree of connection to the Church, and a video soon surfaced of Abe sending a congratulatory video message to a Church-affiliated event in 2021, praising the group for its emphasis on «family values» [McCurry 2022, 22 November]. Abe's brother Kishi Nobuo, then defence minister, admitted his support for the church soon after the assassination [Kobayashi 2022, 30 July]. This set off a media frenzy, and while LDP Secretary-General Motegi Toshimitsu insisted that there was no institutional relationship between the LDP and the Church, the circumstances were too explosive for this to go away without a fuller investigation. An internal LDP investigation soon revealed just under one-half of the party's lawmakers had associated with the organisation in some way or form [McCurry 2022, 1 August]. While there was no evidence of major donations being made to Japanese politicians, the vote-gathering power offered by the Church's members in Japan was seemingly difficult for LDP politicians to turn down given Japan's restrictive Public Offices Electoral Law [*Nikkei Asia*, 2022, 31 August]. Mr. Kishida apologised for his own party's involvement and asked LDP lawmakers to cut all ties with the Church [Mao 2022, 17 October]. He also relented on holding an official government investigation into the Church, saying that he took seriously accusations that the Church had ruined families and exploited followers. The government proceeded to investigate the Church's finances and practices, with a view to potentially stripping it of its legal status and eligibility for tax exemptions [McCurry 2022, 22 November]. Kishida in fact announced in August a cabinet reshuffle with seven ministers who had indicated connections to the Church being moved out of the cabinet [Yamaguchi 2022, 10 August].

In the background of the Unification Church furore also bubbled controversy over Abe's funeral. Kishida somewhat hastily declared a state funeral would be held for Abe but was immediately faced with questions about appropriateness and cost [Iizuka 2022, 27 September; Wingfield-Hayes 2022, 26 September]. It was soon pointed out that state funerals are rare in Japan. Only one state funeral has been held in the post-war period for someone outside of the imperial family – for Yoshida Shigeru in 1967. Yoshida's funeral was in turn the first non-royal state funeral since 1943 when Yamamoto Isoroku, the commander in chief of the Combined Fleet,

died in action during the Pacific War [*The Asahi Shimbun* 2022, 21 July]. In contrast to the funeral for Queen Elizabeth II held at around the same time, Kishida was forced to scale back the degree of ceremony while continually exposed to public antagonism from the dual fallout from Abe's assassination. This was despite the prime minister's lack of personal connections to the group and the fact that his own faction was not as strongly implicated as Mr. Abe's [Mao 2022, 17 October; *Nikkei Asia* 2022, 31 August].

## 12. *Funding Kishida's Reiwa era defence build-up*

While in the first half of 2022 the Japanese public seemed forgiving of inflationary pressures precipitated by the war in Ukraine, in the second half the public grew frustrated with the Kishida cabinet's failure to address problems brought up by Abe's murder and other political missteps. Just as Kishida looked to be extracting himself from the quagmire of the political fallout from Abe's assassination, his problems were further compounded by resignations by his own cabinet ministers. In the space of one month between October and November, three ministers resigned due to political gaffes, funding scandals, and failure to disclose connections to the Unification Church [*Kyodo News* 2022, 11 November]. A fourth minister resigned only a week before the end of 2022 [*Japan News* 2022, 26 December].

Kishida then added to his woes with his insistence that Japan's otherwise well supported defence build-up might need to be funded by a tax increase. This strangled any chance he had to recover his popularity as the prime minister at the end of 2022. Public resistance to tax increases was in fact much higher than opposition to defence spending increases. The public also appeared to be generally split on whether to fund the defence increase from bond issuance, taxation, or from cuts to other budget priorities [*Japan News* 2022, 5 December; *Mainichi Shimbun* 2022, 18 December].

Not only was the tax increase proposal unpopular with the public, many of the same people in the LDP who supported defence spending rise turned out to be the most reluctant to entertain tax increases. In mid-December, representatives of the LDP and Komeito were close to finalizing a tax reform plan to accompany to the release of the new security documents and draft budget. According to the original plan, about JP¥1.1 trillion annually of new funding for defence priorities would come from tax measures. These tax measures would be supplemented by a combination of construction bond issuance, the creation of a «Defence Reinforcement Fund» to gather non-tax revenues (such as government sales of property), expenditure reforms, and the requisitioning of surplus funds from other government accounts (coming to JP¥2.6 trillion annually). Mr. Kishida appeared to forcefully intervene in the process to ensure tax rises remained an option based on his own convictions that he would not issue government

bonds specifically for defence equipment purchase. Kishida continued to insist that defence should be supported by a more «responsible» form of funding that makes «each and every citizen is aware of the need to protect the country» [Imao 2022, 14 December].

As soon as the tax plan became publicly known, it prompted backlash from the wider LDP and even some cabinet ministers. Kishida's rival from the 2021 LDP election and cabinet minister, Takaichi Sanae, tweeted that she «cannot understand the prime minister's intentions in making comments at this point that discourage wage growth» [Imao 2022, 14 December]. When questioned later, she said she would accept being dismissed from cabinet for expressing caution about tax increases [*Japan News* 2022, 18 December; *Mainichi Shinbun* 2022b, 13 December]. Hagiuda Koichi, of the LDP's Policy Research Council and the coordinator of the party's policy, indicated that he preferred the use of government bonds and that there was a «difference in temperature» between him and the prime minister on this matter. Former Prime Minister Suga also openly complained about «insufficient discussion» on the policy of raising taxes to strengthen defence capabilities [*NHK* 2023, 23 January].

This forced Mr. Kishida to delay the introduction of these measures. On December 27, Mr. Kishida noted that he would hold an election before raising the taxes and that they should be raised at «an appropriate time between 2024 and 2027» [*Mainichi Shinbun* 2022, 28 December]. This internal conflict in the LDP took place against the background of a struggle for control both within the Abe faction and between the various LDP factions as various players started to more explicitly position themselves to fill the vacuum left by Abe's death [*NHK* 2023, 23 January]. In particular, those in favour of fiscal consolidation are using this opportunity to reassert themselves after being marginalized somewhat during the Abe administration [Imao 2022, 14 December]. While the ruling coalition «adopted» the tax guidelines noted above, the plan is effectively on hold as Kishida attempted to subdue party resistance by promising to continue talks and not submit the new tax program during the current Diet session. It has also deprived Kishida of a future tool – one of the sources of non-tax money for the new defence budget was a pool of surplus money from the settlement of various special accounts that were previously used for supplementary budgets. If supplementary budgets are to be used in the future, then even larger government bonds issuance will be essential [*Asahi Shinbun* 2022, 16 and 17 December].

### 13. *Conclusions: Kishida's three golden years vanish*

At the end of 2022, Prime Minister Kishida took care of his promise to Abe and his supporters and ushered through potentially the most consequential

changes to Japan's defence posture since the 1980s *with* public support. For good measure, Kishida also effected a reversal in Japan's nuclear zero energy policy – another policy goal of Abe – in similar fashion. As a consequence, Prime Minister Kishida should have been set up to enjoy three golden years of political stability where he could commit political capital to long delayed policies focused on addressing Japan's distributional and demographic issues and instituting his own signature «new form of capitalism» agenda. However, the prime minister starts 2023 in a precarious position having seen his net approval rating decrease by over 40 percentage points compared to his inauguration [Wallace 2023]. Members of his own party and his cabinet – including former supporters of Abe tied to the Unification Church scandals – are willing to defy him publicly. Even the LDP's normally quiet coalition partner Komeito who originally gave its assent to the new security documentation has subsequently questioned Kishida's abilities to implement his bold defence plans together with securing the necessary fiscal resources [*Asahi Shinbun* 2023, 23 January]. Given substantially raised international expectations of Japan to play an increased military role, failure to follow through will have major domestic and international repercussions. Kishida will hope that the anticipated «pay rises above price rises» policy of Japan's major companies will come to fruition and Mr. Kishida can craft a narrative of being able to deliver on his promises following a difficult 2022.

One of the key lessons that Kishida can take from the Abe administration, however, is that being in the international limelight can help burnish a prime minister credentials as a statesperson and offset troubles on the domestic front. Diplomatic tailwinds could assist Mr. Kishida as Japan begins its two-year term as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council on January 1 and also assumes the presidency of the UNSC at the same time [*Japan Times* 2023, 2 January]. As Japan will also chair the G7 in 2023 and host the G7 summit in Kishida's hometown of Hiroshima [Takahata 2023, 26 January], the prime minister will look forward to the G7 summit to recapture some political capital. If he can do that, then he may be in a strong enough position in late-2023 to call a snap election to «renew» his mandate without the LDP suffering substantial losses and thus gain back control of backbenchers within the main ruling party. However, as 2022 demonstrated, the international situation remains turbulent for Japan, providing both opportunities and challenges for enterprising leaders.

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